

Supervisor Romaine's Inaugural Speech Calls for Cooperative Effort by the Town Board to Move Brookhaven Forward

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Supervisor Edward P. Romaine is sworn-in by the honorable Judge James Hudson, Supervising Judge of the Suffolk County Court and Acting Supreme Court Justice, while his wife Diane holds the bible and their grandson Collin Johnson.

Farmingville, NY - On Tuesday, January 7, Supervisor Edward P. Romaine was sworn in to begin his first full, two-year term in office after being re-elected in November 2013. The ceremony was attended by hundreds of people, including elected officials and dignitaries representing all levels of government, civic leaders, guests, friends, family and residents. Following the swearing in, the Supervisor presented his Inaugural Address in which he opened with a call to the Town Board to work cooperatively while facing "major challenges that need to be addressed to ensure that Brookhaven's future is secure."

The Supervisor's request for the new Board to work together produced immediate results. During the re-organizational meeting, which followed the swearing in ceremony, the new Board voted unanimously to approve all resolutions. "Although the Board is politically diverse, I am pleased to see that they are willing to put their differences aside and pull together to work in the best interest of the residents of Brookhaven Town," said Supervisor Romaine.

The Supervisor opened his inaugural speech by highlighting accomplishments during his first year in office. These included a plan to preserve the Carmans River Watershed, a unanimously approved budget without lay-offs, the elimination of nearly \$15 million in pipeline debt, and successfully maintaining the Town's AA+ bond rating. He also mentioned that the Town was able to start the work of rebuilding after Sandy, which continues to this day.

In addition, he cited the following as examples of the Town Board working together during his first year in office:

- To crack down on illegal rooming houses and amend town code to protect our neighborhoods from unscrupulous landlords.

- To create a Green Buildings Committee to reduce energy costs at town facilities and save taxpayer dollars.
- To implement a solar and wind energy program to reduce Brookhaven's carbon footprint and generate revenue.

- To adopt a first-on-Long Island green energy code to promote the use of solar, wind, and geothermal energy in new and existing construction projects.
- And to establish a Vacant Building Registry to require owners (banks) of vacant buildings and homes to maintain them so they don't become eyesores.

Supervisor Romaine announced that his first priority in 2014 will be to reduce debt load as the Town slowly emerges from the recession. He specifically targeted pension debt, which rose from \$8.1 million in 2010 to \$13 million in 2013 despite a declining staff. He explained that in 2010, New York State began to allow municipalities to borrow from the State to pay its pension contribution, at which time the Town borrowed the maximum allowed to pay its pension bill - \$825,007 in 2010 at 5%, almost \$2 million at 3.75% in 2011 and \$4.1 million in 2012 at 3%. His solution is to create a Pension Contribution Reserve Fund. As the Town continues to sell and shed non-essential, non-performing assets that are extraneous to the mission of Town government, some of the proceeds from the sale of these assets will go into this Reserve Fund. He expects that by 2015, the Town will not have to borrow to pay its pension contribution and thereafter the entire pension debt would be retired.

Next on the Supervisor's list of priorities is Solid Waste Management and recycling. Since the landfill is scheduled to close in less than 14 years, the Town as a whole must implement a plan to reduce garbage. His multi-step program starts with reducing the garbage that we produce, recycling as much as possible and reusing what we recycle. His first step was instituting Single Stream Recycling, which started on January 4th of this year. It is estimated that as a result of this initiative, recycling will increase by 25% this year alone, reducing the ash intake at the landfill and generating significantly more revenue for the Town. This "Reduce, Reuse and Recycle" initiative will be expanded to include school districts. In addition, the Town will be working hand-in-hand with other municipalities to explore other waste disposal technologies to address what the Supervisor called "this common challenge."

Supervisor Romaine's long standing dedication to protect and preserve the environment continues to be a priority. He has vowed to work with all levels of government, including the Suffolk County Health Commissioner, to develop a sustainable water quality protection plan that will keep our surface and ground water clean by reducing contamination by pathogens and nitrogen from septic tanks and cesspools. The Supervisor will also work with the County to accelerate the land preservation programs that are already being implemented to protect our water supply.

Energy conservation is also on the Supervisor's agenda for 2014 with a goal to establish more non-polluting, alternative energy sources as part of Long Island's energy portfolio. He vowed to work with LIPA/PSEG to secure approval of his proposed 53 megawatt alternative energy project on 15 town-owned properties. In addition, there will be new energy audits performed on all Town owned facilities and where economically feasible, undertake the work of reducing lighting, heating and cooling bills.

The Supervisor also focused on land use and its lasting impact on the future, stating that because of a pattern of sprawl development, some hamlets "have yet to develop that sense of community." He stated that we must continue to save what is left to prevent overdevelopment and traffic while re-purposing vacant commercial and industrial properties before rezoning. He also indicated a need for "smart planning" and a "diverse housing supply" that includes livable, walkable communities which will tie into economic development and reinvestment in our downtown areas.

Confident that the Town's "best days lay ahead," Supervisor Romaine closed his speech by once again sharing his vision of a Town Board that will work together "to move Brookhaven forward to a better future for us and for generations to come."

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